It is a long way from Milan to Palermo

Decentralist Reforms and Gender Gap across the Italian Peninsula

Linda Basile
University of Siena
lindibas@alice.it

Senem Ertan
University of Siena
ertan@unisi.it

Paper Presented at the XXV SISP Conference
Section 7 “Amministrazione e Politiche Pubbliche”
Panel 7.7 “Genere, partecipazione e rappresentanza nei processi decisionali”
Palermo, 8th-10th September 2011

- DRAFT -

Please do not cite or quote without the permission of the authors
Introduction

In the aftermath of the World War II Western Europe has been characterized by a “torrent of reform”, which has deeply shaped the structure of territorial government. The centralized European nation-states, which have been built throughout the XIX century, have progressively decentralized their structures of government in the second half of the XX century, whereas the change seems to be overwhelmingly in one direction only (Marks et al., 2008). The choice of many central governments to decentralize stemmed eminently from “functional pressures” (Ibidem), to the extent that they were called to face different challenges from those of the past. Within that framework, it appeared a straightforward solution to many political leaders to redistribute competencies and resources to the regional and local tiers.

At the same time, however, the creation of multiple layers of governance has also resulted in the promotion of a potential “political opportunity structure” for those political and social actors that are poorly represented at national level. Literature on territorial politics has generally focused on the impact of such decentralist reforms on ethnic minorities; nevertheless, there is the need to assess whether further levels of governance are likely to create political opportunities also for other traditionally “disadvantaged” groups, such as women.

Within the above outlined theoretical framework, the regionalized Italy represents an interesting laboratory to evaluate whether the same regional institutions have, over the time, increased women’s opportunities of participation in regional assemblies. In fact, regions in Italy have been set up in a heterogeneous socio-economic and cultural context, characterized by the North-South divide, as well as by different levels of “civic-ness” (Putnam, 1993). Accordingly, whereas cross-regional differences in patterns of descriptive representation should emerge, it is worth seeing the conditions (socio-economic, cultural) and the kind of electoral incentives that are more favorable to women. In a nutshell, have Italian women taken advantage of the presence of new institutional bodies at regional level, by increasing their participation in decision-making? The practical interest of such research question is to demonstrate that the institutional reforms are not enough by themselves to ensure further political opportunities to traditionally excluded groups. The case of the decentralist reforms in Italy thus aims at revealing how the same spaces of representation are not homogeneously exploited across different territorial contexts. On the contrary, deeply rooted economic, cultural and political peculiarities seem to play a more crucial role in explaining gender gap, although electoral incentives and other affirmative actions might be used to bridge it. In order to address our research question, a set of hypotheses will be tested,
focusing both on the contextual factors as well as on the policy mechanisms, such as electoral quotas, that are likely to influence women’s representation in regional legislative bodies.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section we will define the key concepts of women’s descriptive representation and decentralization. Then, after a theoretical insight over the potential implications of the latter for female participation, we will introduce some hypotheses, focusing on the peculiar case of the Italian sub-national assemblies. Finally, in the light of the first preliminary findings, we will try to argue whether and to what extent policy interventions, like gender electoral quotas might be able to change territorially consolidated patterns of exclusion.

1. Definition of Key Concepts

1.1. Women’s Representation

The terminology of descriptive representation has been first used by Hanna Pitkin (1967) in her seminal work ‘The Concept of Representation’. This book has been crucial as it was the first systematic attempt to analyze political representation by dividing it into different dimensions. Pitkin introduces four dimensional spaces for political representation; (1) Formalistic representation, (2) Descriptive representation, (3) Symbolic representation and (4) Substantive representation. According to Pitkin, all of the four dimensions of representations need to be carefully analyzed in explaining the concept of political representation because each of them is supplementary to the others. In brief, formalistic representation refers to institutional rules and procedures regulating authorization and accountability of representatives. On the other hand, symbolic representation refers to the evaluations and attitudes of the represented among a symbol representing them. That explains somehow the irrational side of the representation to the extent that the represented accepts and supports the symbols that are presented to them. Substantive representation requires the action of acting for the interest of the constituents. Lastly, descriptive representation introduces the idea that the representative stands for their constituents; there is therefore an important resemblance between representatives and the represented (Pitkin, 1967, 111). This characteristically means that ‘the composition of representative institutions should mirror the composition of the represented in important respects’ (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005). In this respect, descriptive representation of women is commonly operationalized by the numerical composition of female representatives in political institutions as it is a proper and easily measurable indicator of the compositional character of the legislature. For the purposes of this paper, we refer to descriptive representation of women
when we say women’s representation and we operationalize it as the percentage of women in regional assemblies.

### 1.1.1. Why descriptive representation is important?

The political participation of women has been seen by scholars as an important aspect to study because of at least two important reasons\(^1\). First, it is seen as a necessary precondition for the democracy (Rule and Zimmerman, 1997). It is assumed that democratic political institutions are supposed to include representatives of historically disadvantaged groups and the failure of doing so will overshadow democraticness of that institution (Dovi, 2002). Second, it is widely argued that descriptive representation of women will increase substantive representation. It is widely demonstrated that women’s representation in politics is significantly important in explaining the emergence, and implementation of women-friendly policies (Murray, 2008). Once the number of women in decision-making bodies increases, particularly if it reaches to a certain level (the critical mass threshold)\(^2\), they are more able to mobilize others and they cause to some changes in policy processes and policy types (Waylen, 2008). These can be changes in political ideology (Griffin, Newman, and Wolbrecht, 2008), in political behavior (Norris, 1996; Bratton and Haynie, 1999; Reingold, 1992), in social interactions in political life (Thomas, 1994), in policy outcomes (Dhalerup, 1988; Lovenduski and Karam, 2002; Sainsbury 1994; Ljphart, 1991; Thomas, 1991; Saint-Germain, 1989; Waylen, 2008; Dovi, 2002), political agenda (Kanter, 1977; Bratton and Haynie, 1999), political culture (Kanter, 1977; Norris 1996). Therefore, the feminist representation theory suggests that women friendly policy reform results from, in broad terms, the increasing representation of women in politics. These scholars argue that once women have place in the elected office or in a decision maker position, they mostly act for women. The critics to this perspective mainly refer to its theoretical assumption that women share uniform interests (Karlsson, 2009). Many scholars argue that women’s interests are not stereotyped or given in a certain context. Other researches further contributed to these arguments by claiming that gender is an identity which is mostly constructed through the practices of politics (Karlsson, 2009). However, increasing the number of women or even obtaining critical masses can be essential but inadequate to get women’s friendly political outputs.
1.2. Decentralization

1.2.1. The “what” and “why” of decentralization: terminological choices at stake

Since the 1960s, all but few countries, regardless of their size and population have experienced an increase in regional authority, while recent data and research do not account for cases of reverse processes of re-centralization. Nevertheless, there is no broad consensus in literature over the terminological choices to deal with this phenomenon. There is a vast array of terms available, ranging from “regionalization”, “devolution”, “decentralization”, “federalization”. This is not simply a matter of formal labels. The use of a specific definition entails a clear perspective in approaching the issue, as well as a narrower delimitation of the independent variable in our analysis. Most scholars adopt the term decentralization to describe a wide range of reforms characterized by a cession of power, resources and responsibility over policies away from the central government (De Vries, 2000; Schneider, 2003; O’Neill, 2003). In all the definitions, however, it clearly emerges one dynamic component, that is to say the “top-down” initiatives, taken at central level, aimed at transferring authority downwards to sub-national levels, thus designing a multi-tiered structure of government.

Assumed that the decentralist trends that are taking place in Europe are characterized by such a top-down shift of powers, it remains to understand the rationale behind these choices of territorial restructuring.

Several scholars have highlighted the advantages as well as the drawbacks of this kind of reforms, vis-à-vis its antinomic counterpart, that is to say the centralization. Among the purported virtues of the regionalized systems there are: an increased efficiency in the policy field; an enhanced democracy due to the increased opportunities of participation that they open also to those traditionally marginalized groups (included women); a greater closeness of the officials to the problems of the people (De Vries, 2000; Meguid, 2009). Moreover, decentralist solutions are sometimes implemented within the framework of strategies of appeasement of nationalist threats in ethnically heterogeneous contexts (Sorens, 2009).

1.2.2. The process of regionalization in Italy

Italy represents a paradigmatic example in the wider scenario of restructuring polities in Western democracies. When it has been unified in 1861, in fact, it had inherited a historically rooted regional tradition. People used to speak just their regional dialect, the country was deeply divided by socio-economic differences and the past foreign dominations had exacerbated already existing cultural differences among the Italians. Nevertheless, after a long period of strong
centralization, after the World War II, national political actors began to reconsider the demands for a redistribution of power and resources made by the regionalists, in line with the functional pressures that have been discussed in the previous section. At that time, however, the Regioni were just formally acknowledged by the Republican Constitution of 1948, whereas, from 1947 to 1963, only the five regions with a special statute were created4. Decentralization was finally completed in 1968 with the institution of the remaining 15 regions with ordinary statute 5 which was followed by the first regional elections, held in June 1970. A further transfer of administrative and legislative powers, as well as of financial resources, was achieved with a law of 19756 and a decree on implementation of that law, issued in 19777, which both allowed what has been defined as “the general phase of regionalization” (Putnam et al., 1993, Caciagli, 2006). In the 1990s, reforms in the electoral system for the regional constituencies, a further decentralization of the administrative competences8 and the reform of Title V of the Constitution9 have represented decided steps towards decentralization. Recently, the law n. 42 of 200910 has paved the way to the so-called “fiscal federalism”11, strongly pursued by the ethno-territorial party Lega Nord, which is a decisive ally of Berlusconi’s government (Scuto, 2010).

1.3. Bridging the concepts: Why does decentralization matter for women’s descriptive representation?

Literature on territorial politics has generally focused on the impact of decentralist reforms on ethnic minorities; nevertheless, there is the need to assess whether sub-national institutional levels are likely to create a “political opportunities structure” also for other traditionally “disadvantaged” groups, such as women. In order to identify which kind of advantages might be created by meso-level institutions, as the regions, it is worth reflecting on some of their main properties. Firstly, they are often deemed to be less competitive arenas, to the extent that offices at national level still remain the most sought and prestigious goal for politicians; (Vengroff et al., 2003). In line with such considerations, scholars (Vengroff et al., 2003; Rincker, 2009 and 2011; Montoya et al., forthcoming) have argued that women, like other “marginalized” groups, are more likely to gain chances in sub-national arenas. Secondly, in an often male-dominated society, where the responsibility of family care is primarily left to women, offices that are geographically close to their workplaces and houses represent an attractive opportunity to be involved in politics without leaving their own homes. Still, regional assemblies often serve as a channel of “training” and recruiting women to higher offices (Vengroff et al., 2003). Finally, to the extent that regions are often endowed with those competencies concerning family care, health and other policy issues of
great concern for women, women can be further motivated to participate to decision-making in policy areas that are critical for their interests. In other words, women are expected to be more likely to strive for descriptive representation in those arenas having important implications for their substantial representation.

Nevertheless, the achievement of a greater access to offices is not as straightforward as it can appear. In order to effectively ensure a more inclusive participation, decentralist institutions need to be designed in a way that can really benefit marginalized groups. Moreover, social and cultural constraints like a male-driven political leadership; the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities between men and women; the lack of effective measures ensuring equal opportunities in the political competition (as the quotas), are likely to severely downsize the prospective of a more equilibrated representation of genders in regional assemblies.

Within the outlined framework, the hypotheses that will be discussed in the next sections, are just devoted to the identification of the likely impact of decentralist reforms on women’s participation in decision-making in the peculiar case of Italy. Its intrinsic socio-economic territorial heterogeneity, will therefore serve as a basis to test also alternative hypotheses concerning the potential cultural, economic, political and social determinants of women’s descriptive representation at sub-national level.

2. Hypotheses specification

2.1. Decentralization

If the arguments about the alleged positive impact of decentralization on women’s descriptive representation hold true, we should expect that, in Italy, women will be more represented at regional level than at the national one. Similarly, as the process of decentralization has made important steps forwards in the country, female involvement in decision making should show an increase over the time.

*H1a. In Italy the percentage of elected women is likely to be higher at regional than at national level.*

*H1b. As the process of decentralization has developed over the time, women have benefited of increasing opportunities of political participation at regional level.*
At the same time, however, reminding Putnam et al.’s (1993) argument about the long standing peculiarities and divides that characterize Italian regions, we also expect to find a differentiate picture of women’s representation in regional councils.

**H1c. Although the decentralist reforms have taken place at the same time and abiding by the same institutional arrangements, women’s descriptive representation shows uneven patterns across Italian regions.**

If the latter hypothesis holds true, we are called upon to try to provide some causal explanation to such differentiated patterns. Given that the starting condition is the same for all the regions, we therefore formulate some competing hypotheses, drawn from the main literature on women’s descriptive representation. In particular, explanations based on socio-economic, cultural and political factors will be taken into account.

### 2.2. Political Determinants

Cross-national studies on women’s descriptive representation have addressed many political variables such as electoral system, the level of democracy, party system fragmentation, gender quotas, and party ideology. As the focus of this research is only on the regional level, some of these variables cannot be integrated in our models. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper we limited the political variables to the following ones.

#### 2.2.1. Quotas for Women

Many scholars argue that the main reason of the drastic increase in women’s representation in legislatures has been the increasing adoption of women’s quotas around the world (Tripp & Kang, 2008; Tinker, 2004; Yoon, 2004). On the other hand, some case studies as well as cross-national comparisons clearly pointed out that quotas do not always lead to an increase in the women’s representation in legislatures (Paxton et.al., 2009; Miguel,2008) or sometimes even impede the progress of women’s representation (Araujo, 2003). The success of implementation of quotas are linked to different types of internal dynamics of states such as institutional frameworks, details of quota policies, the support of political elites, the support of women’s organizations, courts or ordinary citizens as well as the type of the quotas (Krook, 2009).

Although all quotas aim to increase women’s representation in politics, in some cases they fail to accomplish their objective. For example, even though quotas reach the threshold of 30%, political parties sometimes place women at the bottom of their candidate lists just to meet the legal requirements that clearly hinder the success of the quotas (Dahlerup, 2005). The type of quota, such
as reserved seats, voluntary party quotas or legislative quotas, is widely seen as a determinant of effectiveness of the quotas for women. However, the effectiveness of quotas not only depends on the type of quota but also on multiple conditions by which it is surrounded (Krook, 2009). Within-country variation in quota legislation has been addressed by Zetterberg (2008) as a future direction for research to analyze the effects of gender quotas, it is therefore appropriate to focus on regional differences of quota adoption in Italian regions.

Electoral gender quotas in Italian electoral law: an overview

As argued by the leading literature, proportional electoral systems are more likely to encourage women’s descriptive representation. Regarding this aspect, there are no variations, neither over the time, nor across the regions in the electoral system. In fact, regional councils are elected through a substantially proportional system with majoritarian outcomes.

Accordingly, the only women-friendly condition that can be taken into account as independent variable in this study is the presence of electoral quotas. As for the latter, in fact, we can observe both variations over the time, as well as among the regions.

It should be pointed out that the constitutional principle of formal equality (article 3 Cost.) does not allow “quotas for women” intended to attribute a specific advantage to only one of the sexes, for example by reserving them seats in the assemblies. As a result, Italian law adopted “gender quotas”, formulated in neutral terms (Brunelli, 2005). The legislator can therefore intervene only at the level of candidatures and list formation (electoral quotas), in order to ensure to both sexes equal access to the electoral arena.

Nevertheless, electoral gender quotas refer to as a multiplicity of differentiated actions, as well as similar measures can have different outcomes, in different electoral and political contexts. In particular, they can be designed to: (1) guaranteeing that both sexes are represented by at least one candidate; (2) establishing a threshold for the maximum representation of one sex only. Then, these measures can also be combined with other “corrective” incentives. One is the alternation of male and female candidatures (the so-called “zipper-system”), to avoid that the quotas reserved by the parties to women candidates are just those at the bottom of the list, with low chances to be elected. Another one is the “gender preference”, establishing that, when the voter is allowed to express two preferences, they should be given to two candidates of both sexes. It has been argued, in fact, that the system of preferences tends to downsize the effect of quotas, to the extent that women are usually expected to be less likely to get personal votes.
Finally, the effectiveness of gender quota also hinges upon the presence of sanctions, against those parties that violate the quotas criteria. Scholars usually point out that financial sanctions are less effective than the inadmissibility of the list\textsuperscript{13} (Caielli, 2009).

To sum up, in the absence of the most appropriate political and electoral conditions, there is the risk to have concrete but “blunt” instruments (Petrillo, 2006)

In the light of the above discussions, we hypothesize that:

\textit{H2a: All else being equal, regions where there are quotas have higher rates of women’s descriptive representation than the others.}

Moreover, in order to test the impact of the type of quota, we hypothesize that:

\textit{H2b: The impact of quotas on women’s descriptive representation varies according to the kind of adopted measures.}

2.2.2. \textit{Left wing party}

The effect of the left-oriented political parties on women’s proportion in legislatives has been widely questioned by scholars (Matland, 1998; Kenworthy and Malami, 1999; Reynolds, 1999; Caul 2001; Rule, 1987). The leftist party control over government has been demonstrated to have positive impact on women’s proportion in legislatives (Kenworthy and Malami, 1999; Viterna, 2008) mostly because of their higher commitment to gender equality (Beckwith, 1986, 1992). Left wing parties are also more likely to select female candidates and send more women to the parliaments than other parties (Caul, 1999, 2001). In cross-national terms, it has been demonstrated that countries with Marxist Leninist backgrounds have more women in parliaments because of their commitment to support legal equality of sexes and equal perception of gender roles in society (Paxton, 1997). However, not all studies found a significant relationship between party ideology and women’s representation (Matland, 1998).

On the basis of the above theoretical discussions, it would be proper to assess the correctness of the arguments of cross-national studies on regional level analysis of women’s representation. As many studies have demonstrated positive impact of left-wing party government we hypothesize that

\textit{H3: The existence of the left-wing party majority will increase women’s representation in regional legislatures.}
2.3. **Cultural Determinants**

Culture shapes people’s perception on women’s roles in the society. Even though the effect of cultural differences on women’s political representation has been widely studied, it has long been measured by proxies such as region or religion. Recently, scholars have spent valuable efforts to measure culture in more detailed ways (Norris & Inglehart, 2001; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). For the aims of this research, the following dimensions of culture are used as important factors of women’s representation.

2.3.1. **Gender Egalitarian Attitudes toward Women**

Society’s general understanding of gender roles, which can vary in between more patriarchal & conservative perceptions and more liberal & egalitarian understandings, can have a crucial impact on women’s status in economic, social or political life. These widely spread social perceptions may be also absorbed and accepted by state institutions that would result in a direct impact on the women’s lives. It is widely accepted that patriarchal and conservative societies deem women secondary roles behind men. Classic breadwinner approach is still accepted in many societies where men work and take care of issues of the public sphere and women stay at home and take care of children. Therefore, in those societies, women may be also seen as if they don’t fit to the political offices. These attitudes effect not only gender preference of voters favoring men candidates over women (Sanbonmatsu, 2002) but also women’s decisions to run for the office (Yoon, 2004). Some scholars argue that social bias against women in political offices exist even in more liberal societies such as the US or Australia (Rosenwasser et. al, 1987, IPU 2000). On the contrary, Eric et. al. (2001) claim that the bias against women candidates was only true in the past but it is no more the case. They provide some empirical evidence that voters for House elections in the US are more likely to prefer some women candidates over men (Eric et. al., 2001). Both Norris & Inglehart (2001) and Paxton & Kunovich (2003) questioned if more egalitarian attitudes toward women influence women’s proportion in legislatures and found some confirmative empirical results. Both of the studies created original measurements of gender egalitarian attitudes by using the data from World Values Survey. It is demonstrated that attitudes of people toward gender roles are more important than institutional or structural factors in determining women’s representation in politics.

Individuals with conservative ideology are traditionally seen more likely to oppose gender equality issues such as abortion or contraception than liberals (Arceneaux, 2001; Clark and Clark, 1993). It is also empirically demonstrated that those US states whose electorate are conservatively
driven, tend to have smaller proportion of women representatives in state legislatures than more liberal states (Norrander & Wilcox, 1998). Additionally, empirical evidences are introduced by Fox and Smith (1998) arguing that more conservative voters are also more likely to support men over women for the US Congress elections. Discovering above theoretical arguments and empirical analyses, the following hypotheses are developed;

\[ H4a: \text{The more the people have egalitarian attitudes toward women, the more they are likely to elect female representatives.} \]

\[ H4b: \text{The more the conservativeness the less proportion of women in legislature.} \]

2.3.2. Religiosity

Complementary to cultural differences in perception of proper gender roles, religion and regional factors should be taken into account because religiosity levels can play a significant role in determining women’s representation in politics. Religious doctrine is widely seen as a barrier to women’s political engagement. Many studies have included variables measuring region or religion in their analysis of women’s political representation and figured out that regions where fundamentalist religious doctrine is present, mostly Islamist religious doctrine, are less likely to promote women’s rights (Tripp & Kang, 2008; Paxton, 1997; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). Beside Islamic countries, other countries where religion (all major world religions) is highly involved in the policy-making process are less likely to protect women’s rights as well as most likely to produce oppressive practices against women (Sweeney, 2006, pp.vi,5). Particularly, catholic countries and catholic religion are also widely mentioned as including patriarchal and conservative attitudes towards women (Sweeney, 2006; Paxton, 1997, Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). As we only focus on regional differences within one country, measurement of the individual level religiosity may be an appropriate strategy to assess the arguments about the relationship between religion and women’s representation. Accordingly, some scholars have found positive association between individual level religiosity and support for gender equality (Uysal, 2006).

\[ H5: \text{The more the level of religiosity the less proportion of women in legislature.} \]

2.4. Socio-Economic Variables

So far we have mostly focused on the demand-side determinants of women’s representation. However, women’s social and economic status in a society can be as crucial as cultural and political variables because these are the factors which indicate whether women are qualified enough to come to the office.
2.4.1. Level of Economic Development

The modernization thesis of Norris and Inglehart (2001) suggests that post-industrial societies with high levels of modernization and socio-economic development have more gender equality than others. The main arguments of this theory are that modernization process in wealthy post-industrial countries have transformed their values among gender issues and created a rising tide of support for equality between men and women (Inglehart & Norris, 2003b, p.68; 2004). This analysis finds its roots in the argument that improvement of women’s economic conditions will allow them to involve in public sphere, from where parties draw their candidates, and therefore to trigger women’s presence in parliaments (Darcy, Welch and Clark, 1994 as quoted in Tremblay, 2006). Economic development level also decrease trends in the conservative and traditional attitudes towards women and therefore results to increase in women’s participation in traditionally male dominated spheres. Along this line of research, some scholars tested the impact of economic development level and figured out that it is actually a significant determinant of women’s representation in legislatures (Tripp & Kang, 2008; Hughes, 2007; Matland, 1998), whereas some others did not find a significant impact (Yoon, 2004; Viterna et. al, 2008). As this paper covers regional comparison within one country, we will test the correctness of these cross-national level hypotheses in regional level. From this point of view, it may be useful to assess the accuracy and applicability of macro level theories in micro level analyses. To this end, it is hypothesized that:

\[ H6: \text{The more the region is economically developed the higher female representation in legislatures.} \]

2.4.2. Women’s Development

One of the reasons why women have been underrepresented in political arena is that they have lacked necessary qualifications to run for the office. It has been always the case that parliamentary representatives are elected from political elite who hold special characteristics such as high levels of education, higher economic resources and higher job positions (Zincone, 1988). Therefore, if women do not have equal chances with men when gaining required qualifications for running the electoral office, they would be underrepresented in the higher level political offices. Previous studies increasingly added different variables measuring women’s situation in the society mostly in forms of education level of women or economic participation of women (Arceneaux, 2001; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Paxton, 1997; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003; Tripp & Kang, 2008). The results of these researches have been inconsistent. While some studies founded significant relationship between one or both education level and economic participation of women (Tripp&
Kang, 2008; Arceneaux, 2001; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999), others did not find any or weak confirmative empirical evidence (Paxton, 1997; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). Following the above theoretical concerns, the hypotheses assessed by this study are that;

\[ H7a: \text{The higher the women's education level, the higher the rate of women's political representation.} \]

\[ H7b: \text{The higher the women excluded from the labor force, the less likely they will be represented in legislatures.} \]

3. Data and Research Design

In order to test the aforementioned hypotheses, we have built an original dataset covering the regional electoral rounds that have been held in Italy in the last two decades (pooled aggregate time series data). Accordingly, the time-span chosen for the analysis is the period 1990-2010, accounting for the last five regional elections.

The dependent variable, i.e. women’s descriptive representation at sub-national level, has been operationalized as the percentage of elected women in regional assemblies, using information drawn from the Italian Ministry of Interior. It should be pointed out that, in coding, we have considered only women that have been elected, regardless of following resignations and replacements in office. The dataset also contains information about the absolute numbers of women’s seats, as well as of males’ ones.

As for the independent variables, we have operationalized them as follows:

Political determinants

a. Existence of quotas: it has been measured by using a dummy variable. Accordingly, each region in each electoral round has been coded as 1 whether electoral quotas were provided in that year by the national/regional electoral law, 0 if otherwise.

b. Leftist majority: calculated as dummy variable, it assumes value of 1 when the winning coalition is made up of leftist parties (PCI before 1991, then PDS, PD and also more extreme leftist parties as Rifondazione Comunista, PdCi and the recent Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà), 0 if otherwise.

Both variables have been created using institutional (Italian Ministry of Interior’s database) and legislative sources (official texts of national and regional electoral laws).

Cultural determinants

a. Gender egalitarian attitudes: As for the first measure, the percentage of the people in each region who agreed to the following survey question is calculated: ‘Do you agree or disagree
with the following statements? When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women’. To measure conservativeness, we have taken people’s acceptance of abortion and euthanasia. The question used is: ‘Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between’. As this question has a 10 point scale ranging, we have used the mean levels for each regions. The variable is recoded as 0 being ‘always justifiable’ to 10 ‘never justifiable’. 19

b. Religiosity: A valid measure of the level of religiosity of a region is the percentage of people declaring to attend religious service at least once a week, as well as its counterpart, that is never going to any worship place (non-religiosity level), thus identifying both sides of the same dimension20. For the sake of our analysis, however, we will prefer to use the variable indicating the level non-religiosity, to the extent that it appears to be more linearly correlated with the dependent variable (Pearson’s coefficient r=.40)21.

Socio-Economic Determinants

a. Economic development of a region: the gross domestic product (GDP) is a commonly used indicator of regional development and socio-economic modernization (Putnam, 1993). Here, in order to better compare regions with different demographic characteristics, we have considered the GDP pro capita22.

b. Educational level: It is not easy to find consistent data over the time to identify the level of education among women. Istat, for instance, often uses the scolarity rate, by considering the percentage of people that finish the high school. Nevertheless, especially in the Italian case, it did not appear too useful to compare regions, because high school has become mandatory in the last decade. Hence, we collected data on tertiary education and we calculated the tertiary education ratio for female population in the region, which is the percentage of female for 100 graduated23.

c. Exclusion from labor force: It has been measured as the female unemployment rate (Sources: Eurostat/Istat).

Using the aforementioned variables, we firstly performed descriptive analyses to examine the overall patterns of women’s descriptive representation in Italian regions. In doing that, we have made use of histograms, charts, tables and geographical maps showing cross regional differences over the time. Afterward, we ran OLS regressions in order to assess alternative hypotheses, controlling for political, socio-economic and cultural variables. Finally, in order to evaluate the impact of gender electoral quotas, we complemented our statistical analysis with a more qualitative attempt to classify them according to their implementing mechanisms.
4. Findings and discussion

4.1. The regional level as a mirror of the national patterns of women’s representation

It has been argued that sub-national level elections should be more favorable to female participation than the national ones, to the extent that they are less competitive and that they encourage women to be involved in politics without leaving their home places, because of the geographical proximity of the local institutions (Hypothesis 1a.).

Nevertheless, as Figure 1 (below) clearly illustrates, we do not observe great differences, on average, between national and regional institutions. At the aggregate level, in fact, the overall picture reveals that the mean percentage of women’s representation in sub-national institutions, for each electoral round, does not differ too much from that of national ones, in both chambers. Also, the average percentage of women’s descriptive representation, in the whole time-span considered, is quite similar at national and regional level (8.1%, 10.5%, for Senate and Chamber of Deputies, respectively, and 9.8% for the regional assemblies at aggregate level). Rather, the histograms show an interesting increasing trend at national level, especially after 2006 elections. It can be due to the effects of the proportional system introduced that year after 12 years of prevailing majority system.

Moreover, we cannot observe interesting variations in the average percentages at sub-national level over the time (Hypothesis 1b).

Figure 1 Percentages of elected women in regional assemblies (averages for the period 1988-2010) and in national chambers (1987-2008).

The picture of poor female representation at sub-national level is confirmed by the two charts of Figure 2 (a. and b., below), showing the percentages of women leading the regional executives and of those appointed as presidents of the regional assemblies.
In the light of the above considerations and findings, however, we cannot find support to the first two hypotheses. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the impact of the same institutional reform should have produced even effects in all the regions (Hypothesis 1c). Indeed, the electoral system essentially does not present relevant cross-regional differences, as already specified. Similarly, the political and party system is strongly nationalized, in the sense that it is the party leadership at central level that still has the major say in the formation of candidatures and lists for the sub-national elections. However, a closer analysis at regional level reveals highly differentiated patterns at regional level, as well as over the time (Figures 3-7).

The maps reveal an interesting picture of cross-regional differences. In line with the main explanations about the north-south divide, we find the darker colors (indicating low percentages of elected women) usually in the southern regions, while centre – northern regions (especially Toscana, Emilia – Romagna and Piemonte) usually obtain the best performances. However, another interesting pattern revealed by these figures is the variation over the time. The second round (1995), for instance, saw a neat improvement in ordinary regions while, in the third one, the picture became darker again. At this stage of the analysis, we can argue, as a first likely explanation, that this result might be ascribed to the effect of quotas introduced for the 1995 electoral round and then declared unconstitutional some months after the ballots. Similarly, in the last two rounds other significant improvements can be noticed. Within this framework, the result of Campania in 2010 is quite astonishing (23%, with an increase of 14.7 percentage points from the previous elections). It is also the region that has recorded the highest difference in percentage points between the highest and the lowest level of female representation.
Figure 3. 1st round 1988-1991

Figure 4. 2nd round 1993-1996

Figure 5. 3rd round 1998-2001

Legend:
Percentages of Women’s Elected in Regional Assemblies
The Table in Appendix I shows the percentages in detail, as well as the regional means and the standard deviations that, again, assume a quite high value in the case of Campania. These descriptive insights compel us to look for a likely explanation to such noteworthy cross-regional and temporal variations. In a nutshell, are we dealing with territorially rooted differences (e.g. socio-economic, cultural) that influence female political participation, especially along the north-south divide? And, if so, are they irreversible or do political institutions actually have some leeway to change alleged consolidated patterns?

4.2. Competing explanations to cross-regional differences: an overview

In his famous work on “Civic traditions in modern Italy”, Putnam (1993) addressed the question of the difference in the institutional performance of the Italian regions by focusing on two possible explanations: socio-economic modernity and the civic community (p. 97). It is a well-known fact, indeed, that Italy is far from being a homogeneous country, both economically and culturally. Along the North-South divide, in fact, regions are featured by peculiar characteristics, rooted in the legacy of the history. In a nutshell, although unified one hundred and a half century
ago, Italy remains the mosaic of cultures, traditions and levels of economic growth that the founding fathers of the nation tried to gather under one single flag, political system and language.

Within this heterogeneous framework, it is worth wondering whether such structural and contextual conditions have an impact on women’s representation. On the other hand, however, although consolidated patterns are likely to affect female participation in politics, it should be questioned whether territorial constraints are irreversible or, rather, they can be changed by adopting appropriate measures and incentives to encourage women’s representation (like quotas).

As Figures 8-11 (below) reveal, there seem to be a relationship between the percentage of elected women and socio-economic, as well as cultural variables. Also, the coefficients of correlations (Pearson’s r) highlight a quite relevant linearity of such associations. It means that there is clearly an impact of the context and of territorially rooted peculiarities of the regions on women’s descriptive representation. At a further inspection, we can also observe that, on average, the regions with lower level of socio-economic modernization and more conservative attitudes towards women, showing a weaker female participation, are eminently the southern regions. Accordingly, the hypothesis of a territorial variation based on the north-south divide finds in this pictures important support.

Nevertheless, some observations deserve a closer insight. Campania, for instance, is a southern region, with a low level of economic growth and peculiar cultural background, rooted in its history. However, in one case, it has showed one of the highest percentages of elected women ever, comparable just to that one of a very different region as Toscana. This is only one example, maybe the most straightforward one, but it suggests a possible alternative explanation. In a nutshell, we could argue that, notwithstanding consolidated territorial patterns, some regions manage to “pull” themselves away from the scatter plot. If it is the case, it should be checked whether a political, “top down” intervention might be likely to produce that effect. Accordingly, the OLS regressions can be used to estimate the impact of structural as well as of political and institutional variables on female participation.
Figure 8 Impact of GDP pro capite on percentage of elected women (Pearson’s r = .60)

Figure 9 Impact of unemployment rate on percentage of elected women (Pearson’s r = -.58)
4.3. Insights from the statistical models

Models in Table 1 report the results of the OLS regression analyses examining the effects of socio-economic, political and cultural variables on women’s representation in Italian regions. Model 1 includes socio-economic and political variables. Confirming our theoretical expectations, political variables of existence of quotas and left-wing party as well as socio-economic variables, as
the GDP level of region, have significant positive impact on the proportion of women in regional legislatures, while unemployment rate is negatively associated.

Table 1 OLS models for women’s descriptive representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
<th>Model 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotas</td>
<td>3.461**</td>
<td>3.782***</td>
<td>3.988***</td>
<td>4.048***</td>
<td>3.614**</td>
<td>3.347**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.29)</td>
<td>(3.62)</td>
<td>(3.71)</td>
<td>(3.86)</td>
<td>(3.11)</td>
<td>(2.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftist Majority</td>
<td>2.424*</td>
<td>2.164*</td>
<td>2.683**</td>
<td>2.166*</td>
<td>2.322*</td>
<td>1.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.47)</td>
<td>(2.08)</td>
<td>(2.67)</td>
<td>(2.03)</td>
<td>(2.09)</td>
<td>(1.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>6.291***</td>
<td>2.920</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.71)</td>
<td>(1.48)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>-2.716*</td>
<td>-0.932</td>
<td>-3.641***</td>
<td>-0.738</td>
<td>-4.104***</td>
<td>-1.898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-2.40)</td>
<td>(-0.70)</td>
<td>(-3.53)</td>
<td>(-0.54)</td>
<td>(-3.50)</td>
<td>(-1.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td>-5.635</td>
<td>1.718</td>
<td>-2.694</td>
<td>3.904</td>
<td>-2.713</td>
<td>1.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.17)</td>
<td>(0.33)</td>
<td>(-0.55)</td>
<td>(0.79)</td>
<td>(-0.50)</td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>5.628**</td>
<td>7.219**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.72)</td>
<td>(2.66)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>5.734**</td>
<td>7.939**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.74)</td>
<td>(3.26)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>5.723**</td>
<td>7.029***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.253**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.33)</td>
<td>(3.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isles</td>
<td>1.432</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.81)</td>
<td>(0.54)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Egalitarian Attitudes</td>
<td>-3.468**</td>
<td>-2.055</td>
<td>-1.685</td>
<td>-1.788</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-2.68)</td>
<td>(-1.39)</td>
<td>(-1.06)</td>
<td>(-1.07)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservativeness</td>
<td>-0.0625</td>
<td>0.0738</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.19)</td>
<td>(1.13)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.246</td>
<td>0.601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.92)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constant</td>
<td>-24.62</td>
<td>-29.06</td>
<td>41.03</td>
<td>-6.845</td>
<td>25.91</td>
<td>7.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.24)</td>
<td>(-1.50)</td>
<td>(1.98)</td>
<td>(-0.28)</td>
<td>(1.07)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adj. R-sq</td>
<td>0.448</td>
<td>0.494</td>
<td>0.414</td>
<td>0.484</td>
<td>0.383</td>
<td>0.431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* t statistics in parentheses
* * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Note: GDP, Unemployment rate, education, Gender Egalitarian attitudes and religiosity level are logged variables, in order to meet the normality assumptions of OLS. As for conservativeness, square transformation has been used. Also, gender egalitarian attitudes and conservativeness have been interpolated before transformation, for the missing years (1993-1996).
On the other hand, female tertiary education has a negative but insignificant coefficient, showing that the education level of women does not significantly affect women’s representation in the regional assemblies.

Model 2 presents a replication of the Model 1 by controlling for the dimension of regional difference, with South excluded as reference category. It indicates that political variables, i.e. the existence of quota and leftwing party, holding regional factors constant, remain statistically significant in determining the number of women in regional legislatures. However, socio-economic variables become statistically insignificant once we include regional dummies. It can be explained by the fact that socio-economic variables show significant variation across the north-south divide in Italy. Moreover, the results also confirm that northern regions and the regions in the center of the Italy are more likely select women in legislatures than southern ones. Demonstrated by an insignificant coefficient, the two island regions, Sicilia and Sardegna, do not significantly differ from southern regions in terms of the proportion of women’s representation.

As an alternative model, we ran regression analyses by including cultural variables. Because of problems of multicollinearity, we excluded from it the level of GDP (correlation rate with attitudes toward women = .67). We used attitudes towards women and the level of conservativeness as cultural variables and we did not include the level of religiosity because of two reasons. First, it is highly correlated with the variable of conservativeness (.60) and second, the data for the variable of religiosity have high number of missing observations (20). As seen from the table, in Model 3 only educational level and conservativeness do not have significant coefficients. On the contrary to our hypothesis 5, the level of conservativeness does not have a significant relationship with women’s representation, whereas negative attitudes towards women have an important negative impact on the proportion of women in regional legislatures. Moreover, as in the previous models, the existence of quota and left-wing majority party also have significant positive impact on women’s representation. Additionally, unemployment rate of women is negatively associated with female representation.

In Model 4, region dummies are added with respect to the analysis of Model 3. As in Model 2, once the regional dummies are included in the analysis, all the other variables become insignificant with the remarkable exception of political variables. This result shows again that regional dummies eliminate the effect of socio-economic and cultural variables, as above explained. On the other hand, the existence of quota and left-wing majority party have a significant positive impact on women’s representation notwithstanding the regional variation. Model 4 also confirms
our arguments about the uneven representation of women between Italian regions whereas northern and center regions are more women-friendly than the southern regions.

To the extent that we could not include religiosity in Model 3 and 4, we wanted to run an alternative Model including people’s religiosity levels instead of conservativeness. However, it should be noted that because of unavailability of data, this variable includes only the period 1993 to 2010. Nevertheless, cultural variables become insignificant in Model 5. However, as in the previous Models, once the region dummies are included, even the socio-economic variables lose significance (see Model 6). Moreover, in Model 6 the political variable of left wing majority has also a statistically insignificant positive coefficient. This might be due to the decrease in the number of observations; therefore, this result should be interpreted cautiously. Like the previous Models, the existence of gender quotas has a positive impact on women’s representation and so do the center regions. However, the coefficient of leftwing party majority and those for north eastern and north western regions appear to be insignificant, the reason of which may be the drop of high number of cases.

In short, regression models of this research demonstrate that there is a positive impact of political variables and regional differences on women’s representation in regional assemblies. Having discovered variances in quota legislations at the regional level, next part of this study examines more in depth why and how do the gender quotas affect women’s representation levels.

5. “The quotas’ factor”: can policy change address the problem of weak female representation in Italian regional assemblies?

What has been revealed by the statistical analyses is that different levels of socio-economic modernity and cultural peculiarities, deeply rooted in the historical territorial divides of the peninsula, are likely to influence the percentage of elected women in regional assemblies; nevertheless, when a system of gender electoral quotas is introduced in some of the regions, it seems to produce a positive effect on our dependent variable. Quantitative analyses thus give us an interesting hint about which direction our research can follow in order to unravel the determinants of female representation.

What the raw numbers do not say, however, is the kind of quotas that have been adopted over the time in some regions. This is not a trivial issue. As argued before, in fact, analogous instruments can produce different effects depending on the political system and the specific mechanism envisaged by the law. Hence, there is the need to point out at least the main features of gender electoral quotas in the Italian regional scenario.
Table 2 Gender electoral quotas in regional electoral laws since 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>No minimum percentage established</th>
<th>50% of one sex</th>
<th>70% of 60% of one sex</th>
<th>No electoral gender quota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadmissibility of the list</td>
<td>- Valle D’Aosta* (until 2007);</td>
<td>- Lazio (2004, regional list);</td>
<td>- Marche (after 2005);</td>
<td>- Emilia-Romagna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Calabria (2004);</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Liguria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Marche (only 2005)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Veneto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Lombardia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Molise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Sardegna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Basilicata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Umbria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Trentino Alto Adige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No explicit sanction</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Piemonte (2009)</td>
<td>- Sicilia (provincial list, 2005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The regions in bold character are those adopting also a “zipping system” for the regional list; *Valle D’Aosta in 2007 introduced a minimum threshold of 20% for the representation of each sex in the lists. **Toscana has abolished both regional lists and preferences and it establishes that at the top of the list there should be from 1 to 5 regional candidates of both sexes. Campania is the only region, so far, to have adopted also a system of double preference guaranteeing that they should be given to candidates of both sexes.

Originally, the national law of 1968 did not include any provision about gender. However, in 1995, it was emended by the law n. 43, which, at art. 1.6, established that “neither sex should account for more than two-thirds of the candidate lists for the seats to be assigned with the proportional system”. Although 1995 elections were held with this provision in force, it was declared unconstitutional in the same year by the Constitutional Court, as it infringed art. 3 Cost. and art. 51 Cost. Between 2001 and 2003, however, in a completely new political environment, several constitutional reforms paved the way for a further implementation of electoral gender quotas. It is noticeable, in particular, the reform of art. 51 of the constitution, to which a new paragraph was added, thus allowing the Court to finally leave aside all the doubts of constitutionality regarding gender based positive actions (Caielli, 2009). Since then, many regions that have adopted their own regional electoral law, in (sometimes only partial) substitution of the national provisions, have included gender based mechanisms. However, they have chosen different kinds of quotas, so that the overall scenario of electoral gender quotas tends to be cross-regionally
uneven. A synopsis of the current legislative picture concerning quotas among Italian regions is shown in Table 2, above. The latter, together with the comparisons of percentages of Appendix II allows us to qualitatively compare the impact of different kinds of quotas.

It is worth noticing, for example, that in the electoral round of 1995, when all the ordinary regions adopted the quotas provided by the amendments to the national law of 1968, all regions but Veneto saw an increase in women’s representation, sometimes even consistent (Lombardia, Umbria, Lazio, Puglia, to make some examples). This is also in line with the maps showed in Figure 2, in the previous sections, showing a lightening of the colors of the Italian regions. Then, in the following round, when no quotas have been adopted because of the aforementioned constitutional constraints, the percentages dropped again. However, when since 2004 some regions started to introduce quotas in their own regional electoral laws, the effects of positive incentives to female candidatures became evident again. Moreover, in this case, there is no a single kind of quota, but, rather, each region has chosen different mechanisms and thresholds for gender representation. Overall, the regions increased their percentages of women in regional assemblies when elections were held under more “women-friendly” conditions. In some cases, as in Toscana, the positive effect was of 12.6 percentage points in 2005 with comparison to previous election, although in the last electoral round there was a decrease of 5.7 percentage points. Similarly, Sicilia saw an increase of elected women when the quotas were adopted for the first time and, then, a following drop in 2008. While these fluctuations might be due also to a wide range of contingent factors, it cannot be underestimated the fact that, in general, when quotas are introduced, they have a positive effect on women’s descriptive representation. The most interesting case, however, is that one of Campania in 2010. It is a southern region, traditionally characterized by low socio-economic development and relative cultural conservativeness. Notwithstanding such structural conditions, in the last electoral round it has dramatically increased the presence of women in the regional assemblies, whereas the current council is made of 23% of women, 14.7 percentage points more than in the previous assembly. Although it is difficult to argue any generalizations from a single case in one point in time, it is worth noticing that in 2009 Campania has adopted a kind of quotas that represents a unicum in the Italian legislation. Together with the threshold of gender representation, in fact, it has introduced the “double preference”, commonly considered as a remedy to the “male-bias” hanging on the mechanism of preferences. Whether the exceptional strength of the measure adopted in Campania is the real and main reason of this electoral breakthrough for that southern region, is something that we cannot definitively infer, yet, with the few cases at our disposal so far. Nevertheless, our preliminary findings and a qualitative assessment of the impact of
quotas over the time allow us to raise a reasonable argument. In a nutshell, even apparently
irreversible structural conditions, affecting female participation, are likely to be adequately
addressed by mechanisms designed to effectively ensure equal opportunities to both genders in the
electoral arena.

Conclusions

In this paper, the effects of decentralization, as well as of other political, socio-economic and
cultural factors, on women’s representation have been analyzed. By adopting a cross-regional
comparative design, we have assessed the existing arguments about women’s descriptive
representation usually adopted in cross-national studies. First of all, we did not find any empirical
evidence to support the arguments of previous scholars about the positive effect of decentralization
on women’s representation levels. On the contrary, in the Italian case, decentralization did not result
in a significant change in the average of women’s numerical representation in the regional
legislatures, whereas there has been a steady increase at national level in 2000s. As hypothesized,
because of the widely varying characteristics of Italian regions, women’s descriptive representation
has been unevenly distributed across regions. However, the main finding of this paper is that
beyond region itself, there are important political factors which are crucial for women’s
representation in regional assemblies of Italy. The impact of gender quota has revealed to be a key
policy instrument to increase the numbers of women in regional legislatures, as well as the
existence of a left-wing majority party. These findings confirm previous researches that show
significant relationships between political variables and women’s representation. Moreover, the
importance of political variables on women’s representation demonstrates that the problem of
women’s exclusion from politics can be actually addressed through policy changes. With this
regard, although Putnam was right in arguing that there are consolidated differences between Italian
regions, however, today politicians have the incentive to intervene on those structural conditions by
using effective instruments. Accordingly, the findings of this paper might have important
implications for policy makers. As the example of gender quota policy in Campania shows, the
better the policy implemented, the better is the improvement on women’s representation regardless
of the territorially rooted constraints. Of course, the results of this paper should be further
developed with a more thorough analysis, comparing more cases, countries and longer time periods
in order to generalize the results of this specific case and to gather a macro-level theory.

This study also suggests a number of directions for the future research on women’s
descriptive representation. First of all, further qualitative and quantitative researches are needed to
explore more in detail the impact of quota type on women’s representation. These researches might particularly focus on strategies to classify quota types in Italian regions or to operationalize them in quantitative terms. Moreover, different statistical methods such as cross sectional time series analysis or panel regressions may be applied. Finally, this paper also paves the way for further analyses on gender equality. In particular, by observing gender disparities at regional level, a second research avenue would be that one to examine whether regions with a greater number of elected women are also more likely to promote women’s substantive representation.
Appendix I - Percentages of elected women in regional assemblies by electoral year, means, standard deviations and difference between the best and the worst performances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PIEMONTE</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15.02</td>
<td>3.524</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALLE D'AOSTA</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>5.172</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOMBARDIA</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>3.407</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRENTINO -A. ADIGE</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>13.72</td>
<td>5.513</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENETO</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>9.88</td>
<td>3.206</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIULI-V.G.</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>3.365</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIGURIA</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>3.956</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILIA-ROMAGNA</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.162</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOSCANA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMBRIA</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>5.774</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCHE</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>12.76</td>
<td>3.367</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAZIO</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>4.909</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABRUZZO</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>5.594</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOLISE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>6.295</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMPANIA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.62</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUGLIA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>5.088</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASILICATTA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALABRIA</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.896</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SICILIA</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.725</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARDEGNA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>2.352</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix II - Percentages of elected women before and after the introduction of quotas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quotas</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIEMONTE</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16,7</td>
<td>11,7</td>
<td>11,7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALLE D'AOSTA</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>5,7</td>
<td>11,4</td>
<td>14,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOMBARDIA</td>
<td>7,5</td>
<td>15,6</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>13,7</td>
<td>8,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE</td>
<td>7,1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12,9</td>
<td>18,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENETO</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7,7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA</td>
<td>6,5</td>
<td>10,2</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>13,3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIGURIA</td>
<td>7,5</td>
<td>15,6</td>
<td>7,5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMILIA-ROMAGNA</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOSCANA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24,6</td>
<td>18,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMBRIA</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>16,7</td>
<td>13,3</td>
<td>16,6</td>
<td>16,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCHE</td>
<td>7,5</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAZIO</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>18,3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17,1</td>
<td>14,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABRUZZO</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOLISE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13,3</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMPANIA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>5,1</td>
<td>8,3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUGLIA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12,7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>5,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASILICATA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>6,7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALABRIA</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>9,5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>8,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SICILIA</td>
<td>2,2</td>
<td>1,1</td>
<td>1,1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARDEGNA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8,8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Consiglio regionale della Lombardia-Direzione Generale Assistenza legislativa (2002)”Quali regole a sostegno della rappresentanza politica delle donne?” Dossier di documentazione per la commissione statuto. Available at: http://62.101.84.82/gs/Portale/dati.nsf/af42c46e2b48d85b4125702f0058998ff90b5d531adb53bc1256e6e002cf99b/$FILE/quaderno_donne.pdf


http://nppr.se/2009/05/15/interests-womens-representation-and-prostitution-policy-reform/


Notes

1 For more detailed reasoning see Mansbridge (1999)

2 The foundation of four level proportionality by Kanter (1977) in her article of “Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women” is a turning point for the approach of critical masses. Despite some exceptions, there is general agreement that “where women constitute less than 15 percent of a legislative body, women’s influence will be constrained at best” (Beckwith, 2007).

3 For those who are familiar with Italian history, this argument recalls Massimo D’Azeglio’s well known motto “Fatta l’Italia, occorre fare gli Italiani” (translation: Having made Italy, it is necessary to do the Italians). It means that, after the country unification, it was necessary to complete the process of nation-building through a somewhat forced process of assimilation and integration of the complex mosaic of Italian regional identities.

4 Sicilia in 1947, Sardegna, Trentino Alto Adige and Valle D’Aosta in 1948 and Friuli Venezia Giulia in 1963. These were peripheral regions, characterized by specific ethnic or socio-economic problems, which required a more focused intervention (Caciagli, 2006)

5 Law n.108 of 17th February 1968: “Norms for the elections of the regional councils of the regions at ordinary statute”. 

6 Law n. 382 of 22nd July 1975: “Norms concerning the regional asset and the organization of public administration”.

7 Decree of the President of the Republic n. 616 of 24th July 1977.

8 The so-called “Bassanini Laws” of 1997.

9 The reform, approved by a centre-left majority and definitively confirmed through a constitutional referendum in 2001, concerns the formal distribution of powers. Article 117 of Title V, in particular, lists the competences reserved to the central states, thus leaving those remaining to the regions.

10 See the complete list of implementing decrees and legislative processes at: http://www.governo.it/GovernoInforma/Dossier/federalismo_fiscale/, last accessed on 22th March 2011.

11 Fiscal federalism aims at guaranteeing fiscal and financial autonomy to local and regional authorities, in line with the constitutional principles stated in art. 119, as emended in 2001 (Cost. law n. 3 of 18th October 2001).

12 A detailed explanation of such complex system goes far beyond the scope of the present paper. Nevertheless, the main peculiarity of such a system is that there are two lists, one provincial and one regional. According to the law n. 108 of 1968 and following modifications, the 80% of seats are proportionally distributed according to the provincial lists, while the remaining 20% is assigned to the regional list linked to the winning candidate to regional presidency. Only half of the list is assigned when the president has already gained the 50% of the proportional lists. Although some regions, since 2004, began to adopt their own electoral law, they left basically unaltered the original electoral mechanism. Toscana, however, has abolished the regional list.

13 For example, in the case of Puglia, it is the elected President of the Regions that has to approve a decree establishing the amount of the financial sanction. Of course, it is unlikely that he/she can approve a severe sanction on his/her own party!

14 Dataset on “Women in Italian Regional Assemblies” (hereinafter: WIRA).

15 According to the Italian system of regional legislatures, they are numbered as V legislature (1990-1995), VI legislature (1995-2000), VII legislature (2000-2005), VIII (2005-2010), IX (2010 - ). Nevertheless, some exceptions should be pointed out. Firstly, the regions with special statute (Valle D’Aosta, Trentino Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sicilia and Sardegna) follow a different numeration of the legislature. It is due to the fact that these regions have
been instituted well before the other 15 with “ordinary statute” (1970). Accordingly, in the five “exceptional” regions there have been more than nine legislatures, so far. For instance, in Sicily the last electoral round has elected the members of the XV legislature. Nevertheless, for the sake of homogeneity and clarity with the data, we conventionally considered the special statute’s legislatures with the numeration used for the ordinary statute ones.

Secondly, Molise in 2000 elected an assembly which was declared illegitimate by the Regional Administrative Court (TAR) after less than one year. The next elections have been held in 2001. Given the proximity of the two elections, as well as the declared illegitimacy of that electoral result, I treated the electoral round of 2000 as missing case (observation with no values) and I just considered the elections of 2001, included in the VII legislatures’ round. Third, because of the special statute’s systems and problems of illegitimacy of elections, some elections have been held in different years. It is also the case of Abruzzo, which anticipated the elections for the IX legislature to 2008, because of the juridical proceedings against the governor Ottaviano Dal Turco, who handed his resignations. Also according to the previous point, although the time span is 1990-2010, in order to take into account five legislatures also for the special statute regions I included electoral years as 1988, 1989, when the elections in these regions have been held.

Our elaboration from “Anagrafe Amministratori Locali e Regionali” Italy Home Department. Online data available at: http://amministratori.interno.it/amministratori/AmmIndex5.htm last accessed 18th March 2011; also, the websites of the regional councils were consulted to cross check the data, as well as the “women and men in decision making database” of the EU commission for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=764&langId=en). Some inconsistency among the different sources, however, can be due to several factors as: elected representatives that leave their seat to be part of the executive body (Giunta), contested seats and so on.

The reliability of all the variables has been checked by confronting collected data with other sources, documents and literature, whenever possible.

The political party (or coalition) supporting the winning president of the region has been considered as important indicator. The dataset, however, also contains information about the percentage of women elected from leftist parties.

As a measure of attitudes towards women and conservativeness, the second (1990), third (1999) and fourth (2009) Waves of the European Values Surveys and fifth wave (2005) of the World Values Survey have been used as the main source of data. The dates of the surveys represent a good fit with the years of regional elections in Italy. As no surveys are conducted between 1990 and 1999, we had to interpolate the missing cases for the election period of 1993 and 1996. Regarding the survey questions used by the EVS and WVS, there are some other questions measuring people’s attitudes towards women but some of those questions are not available in each wave of the surveys of our interest. Some of those available questions cannot be utilized for the Italian case because of the fact that they are not appropriate measures for Italy. Therefore, we have only used one question as a proxy instead of creating an index.

Source: Istat – “Indagine Multiscopo sulle famiglie: aspetti della vita quotidiana”. Since 1993 Istat has released yearly publications of survey data on a various range of questions. One of them relates to the frequency of attendance to worship places. We entered data for those people attending religious practice at least one a week (it is the minimum for catholic practice) or never. However, we do not have data for the period 1988-1992, as far as the survey was not released at that time, yet.

The correlation with the religiosity level (those attending worship place once a week) has a Pearson’s r = -.31.

Source: ISTAT (1995-2009): GDP at market price for inhabitant. (2009 used also for 2010, as the latest data have not been released, yet). For the period between 1988-1995 I consulted the data elaborated by crenos_unica, available at: http://crenos.unica.it/crenos/en/content/databases (last accessed 18th March 2011), which relies on Istat data. Nevertheless, Crenos does not give the GDP pro capita, but just the regional GDP and an estimate of the population. Accordingly, for the period 1988-1995 GDP pro capita has been obtained by dividing GDP/Population.

Source: “Istat – Indagine sull’istruzione universitaria”. Data are available only since 1992, so we miss data for the Valle D’Aosta, Trentino, Friuli and Sardegna 1988, as well as for the others year of Valle D’Aosta, to the extent that
Istat has not surveyed data for that region. Furthermore, since 2001 Istat has distinguished between BA and MA level of tertiary education. As far as, in Italy, the former degree is recognized the same as the current MA level (“laurea specialistica e a ciclo unico”), we selected data only for the latter classification. Nevertheless, because of this difference in the gathering of data, percentages for the last years might result to be overestimated. Finally, for 2010 we used data referred to the academic year 2008/2009, which are the latest available.

North East includes: Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Emilia Romagna; North West: Piemonte, Valle D’Aosta, Lombardia, Liguria; Center: Toscana, Umbria, Marche, Lazio; South: Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria; Isles: Sicilia and Sardegna.

Almost all the Italian regions have included statements of principle, concerning the need to ensure equal opportunities of participation to electoral competitions to both sexes, in their respective regional statutes. Nevertheless, such provisions do not go too far beyond the mere expression of principles and programmatic norms.

Law 43, 23 February 1995 “New Regulations for elections of councils in regions with ordinary statute”

About the political debate surrounding such reform and the divisions among women’s politicians, see Guadagnini (2005b).

Sentence 6-12 September 1995, n. 422. Guadagnini (2005b) criticizes such pronouncement, defining it as the product of “closed, male-dominated subsystem”. In that occasion the Court annulled also a similar provision regarding national elections for the lower Chamber (Camera dei Deputati).

Art. 51 cost, in its old formulation, stated: “All citizens of either sex can have access to public offices and elective posts under equal conditions”.

The new formulation of art. 117 Cost., approved with constitutional law n. 2 of 2001, at seventh paragraph, now states that: “Regional laws remove any obstacle impeding the full parity of women and men in social, cultural and economic life and promote the parity of access between men and women to elective offices” (our translation).

With the constitutional law n. 3 of 30th May 2003.

“…the Republic promotes with appropriate provisions the equal opportunities between women and men”.

In fact, in 2003, the Constitutional Court rejected the appeal made by the Government against a provision regarding electoral gender quotas included in the regional electoral law of Valle D’Aosta (Sentence n. 49 of 2003).

Maybe as an effect of a change in the complex electoral system, which has increased from 2 to 5 the number of regional candidates (that should represent both sexes but without a specified order) in the lists.